



Book reviews

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In return, as a service to readers, this review section of *Ibis* is organized and edited by Michael G. Wilson and Professor Ben Sheldon of the Edward Grey Institute, with the help of a panel of contributors. They are always grateful for offers of further assistance with reviewing, especially with foreign-language titles.

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BALMER, D., GILLINGS, S., CAFFREY, B., SWANN, B., DOWNIE, I. & FULLER, R. **Bird Atlas, 2007–11: The Breeding and Wintering Birds of Britain and Ireland**. 720 pages, many colour illustrations, photographs and maps. *Thetford: BTO Books, 2013. Hardback, £69.99, ISBN: 978-1-908581-28-0. Website: <http://www.bto.org>.*

This massive large-format tome combines the results of the third breeding bird atlas produced in Britain and Ireland, the previous two dating from 1968–72 and 1988–91, with those of the second winter atlas, follow-

ing the one that took place during 1981–84. The majority of species accounts, which are the core of the content, each occupy a double-page spread, as in the previous atlases. The text sensibly focuses on key patterns and trends highlighted by the data, rather than on the species' appearance and behaviour, with more space given to the maps. These not only show the current breeding and wintering distributions by 10-km squares (a few more sensitive species were mapped less precisely) for 296 of the most regularly occurring species, but also the distribution changes that have taken place

in winter and/or summer since the previous surveys, these maps being perhaps of the most immediate interest to the average reader. Some show encouraging increases (e.g. Red Kite *Milvus milvus*), others very depressing declines (e.g. Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*).

In addition to providing presence/absence and evidence of breeding status, fieldworkers were asked to count the number of individuals noted during time-standardized visits to at least eight tetrads (2 × 2 km squares) in their allocated 10-km square. These data were used to produce maps of relative abundance for either or both seasons for most species, to show where populations were concentrated, using various sophisticated statistical modelling techniques. In addition, as abundance data were also available from the 1988–91 breeding atlas, it was possible to produce maps showing how relative breeding abundance has altered since then, these data displayed by 20-km squares. On some maps, the changes are very easy to spot – the eastward march of both Raven *Corvus corax* and Buzzard *Buteo buteo* is very striking, for instance. Others repay closer study to tease out the detail. For example, although Grasshopper Warblers *Locustella naevia* have declined in relative abundance across much of England, their densities have increased in large parts of Scotland, Wales and Ireland, and Bullfinches *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*, although remaining widespread, have increased in Ireland at the same time as densities have reduced in southeast England.

Before the species accounts, the book's preliminary section is particularly extensive, running to 156 pages. Among this section is a chapter giving detailed guidance on how to interpret the various symbols used on the maps, and this repays careful reading, as an enormous amount of information is crammed into a small space on each one. For quick reference, the key points are summarized on the inside front and back covers.

The rest of the preliminaries cover the background and scope of the survey, the methods and data sources used, how the data were captured, analysed and converted into maps, and what biases, if any, there might have been in coverage and effort. Much of this is necessarily rather technical, although certainly invaluable to those involved in organizing future atlases. However, the chapter on the patterns and changes in the region's avifauna over a 40-year period is definitely worth a careful read by everyone, as it complements the species accounts by grouping them in different ways, discussing population and range dynamics, and linking them with various potential drivers such as habitat quality and climate change.

The book is well laid-out and the illustrations and tables are very clear, the full-page artwork, by Dave Daly, opening each chapter being particularly striking. The species accounts each have a colour photograph of the bird concerned, also adding to the visual appeal of the book. There is an extensive list of references and a species index, plus five appendices, one including the

names of all the people (over 17 000!) who submitted records directly to the survey. In all, over 40 000 volunteer observers took part in this project, and everyone involved should feel delighted with the end result, a source of inspiration for all interested in the study and conservation of the birdlife of these islands.

Ken Hall

COUZENS, D. **Tales of Remarkable Birds.** 224 pages, numerous colour photographs. London: Bloomsbury Natural History, 2015. Hardback, £20.00, ISBN 978-1-4081-9023-4. Website: <http://www.bloomsbury.com>.

At first glance this looks to be yet another gift book about birds like so many others; silky-smooth pages hosting a wealth of lavish photographs, accompanied by an apparently subordinate text that need not necessarily trouble the reader. On closer inspection, however, it turns out that this is a truly remarkable bird book in which every word is worth a thousand pictures.

Writing with lucid clarity and infectious enthusiasm, Dominic Couzens outlines what scientific enquiry has revealed about selected aspects of the behaviour of 40 different birds from around the world. Spellbinding from start to finish, the insights contained here are fascinating and wide-ranging: from the distinctive bill shapes of the different feeding guilds among Eurasian Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* to the adaptation to the lunar cycle of nocturnal-foraging Swallow-tailed Gulls *Creagrus furcatus*; from the strategic arrangement of eggs in the shared nests of Common Ostriches *Struthio camelus* to the underwater mastery of Light-mantled Albatrosses *Phoebastria palpebrata*; from the sacrificial care of dominant male Varied Sittellas *Daphoenositta chrysoptera* to the traffic-dodging, reduced wingspans of American Cliff Swallows *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*. This is a wonderful 'celebration of ornithological science', to quote the author's own, refreshingly unapologetic, description; yet one that is as ready to acknowledge what currently remains concealed as it is to delight in all that has so far been revealed.

The species accounts are spread over eight sections – Europe, Africa, Asia, Australasia, North America, South America, Antarctica and Islands – which seems as good an arrangement as any given the vast scope of the subject matter. The decision to exclude examples of bird behaviour with which readers are likely to already be familiar, and to include only species seen personally by the author in the wild, makes for reading that is both genuinely enthralling and completely convincing.

Although the prose is perhaps just a tad overindulgent in places, and the instances of deficiencies in the publisher's proofreading process are sufficient to become irksome, on the whole this book constitutes a masterclass in the effective communication of scientific

findings to a popular audience. It deserves to be – and has the potential to be – a mainstream bestseller on the scale of books such as (the arguably less authoritative) *Does Anything Eat Wasps?* and *Why Don't Penguins' Feet Freeze?* Regrettably, it is doubtful that this potential will ever be realized as long as the book is allowed to continue masquerading as a gift title; a state of affairs that will surely see it consigned all too soon to remainder outlets and garden centres. It is earnestly to be hoped, therefore, that the superb content of this volume can be repackaged and retitled as a matter of urgency so as to give the material a fighting chance of captivating the mass-market audience that undoubtedly exists for it and that it so richly deserves.

Nigel Hopper

COUZENS, D. & SISSON, M. **The Secret Lives of Puffins.** 176 pages, numerous colour photographs. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013. Hardback, £20.00, ISBN 978-1-4081-8667-1. Website: <http://www.bloomsbury.com>.

DUNN, E. **Puffins. (RSPB Spotlight.)** 128 pages, numerous colour photographs. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014. Paperback, £9.99, ISBN 978-1-4729-0354-9.

KRESS, S.W. & JACKSON, D.Z. **Project Puffin. The Improbable Quest to Bring a Beloved Seabird Back to Egg Rock.** xvi + 357 pages, 8 colour plates, numerous black-and-white photographs. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015. Hardback, £20.00, ISBN 978-0-300-20481-0. Website: <http://www.yalebooks.co.uk>.

Everyone loves a Puffin (except to handle!). In the space of two years, three books on this species have been added to the ornithological literature, each taking a distinctive approach to the subject.

The Secret Lives of Puffins serves as a showcase for Mark Sisson's photographs documenting the life of the Atlantic Puffin *Fratercula arctica*. The text by wildlife writer Dominic Couzens is aimed at the general reader, and this book forms part of the RSPB series on the 'secret lives' of various bird species of popular appeal. A book with over 100 photographs of the same species runs the risk that the impact of each individual image will be reduced. And, in fact, I think I would have found this book more appealing if the number of photographs had been reduced, with only the very best and most informative retained. For me, some were a bit mundane, not helped by the quality of the reproductions, which may have been due to some being scanned colour slides rather than digital images. The book is organized into 11 chapters: after introducing the species

and the conservation threats it faces, Dominic Couzens describes our current knowledge of Puffins at sea, has a few words to say about Puffin flight, goes into a bit more detail on where they live during the breeding season, their general behaviour, colony life and pair-formation, then three chapters on the breeding season from digging out the burrow to egg-laying, chick-rearing and departure, and finally one on its main predators. The author has managed to convey a lot of information in a readable form, and I would recommend this to anyone wishing to have an introduction to Puffins.

The second book, *Puffins*, is in another RSPB series spotlighting different species. Its format differs from the previous one in being paperback, much smaller, and profusely illustrated on glossy paper. I found it a delightful read, with authoritative yet very accessible text by Euan Dunn. His extensive knowledge and experience of seabirds, as the RSPB Principal Marine Advisor, shows clearly in his writing, which contains lots of neat facts drawn from the scientific studies of Mike Harris, Sarah Wanless and others. I was very impressed by how much information had been packed into this small volume, and the illustrations were much better printed than in the previous book under review – strange, given that they were both published by Bloomsbury Press. The fact that the illustrations were drawn from a much wider group of photographers has helped to maintain a high quality and diversity, and these were clearly selected carefully to illustrate particular points in the text. Definitely worth buying!

The final book on Puffins, *Project Puffin*, is essentially an autobiography – a gripping one that charts the 40-year crusade of Stephen Kress to tempt Puffins back to Eastern Egg Rock, off the coast of Maine, where they once bred until extirpated by local hunters in the late 1800s. I well remember as a PhD student receiving the first issues of *Egg Rock Update* – Kress's newsletter reporting on his efforts to succeed with 'Project Puffin'. I was full of admiration for what he was trying to do, though I did wonder whether he could actually achieve his goal. Since then, Project Puffin has managed to restore more than 1000 pairs to five islands in Maine. His dedication and tenacity is inspiring to any conservationist who might be thinking of giving up their struggles. To them I say, read this book! You will see that almost anything is possible if you put your mind to it. I read this book in awe of the full story of his efforts – with virtually no resources, he transplanted young (10- to 14-day-old) Puffins from Great Island to Egg Rock, constructing artificial sod burrows for them. They were then fed daily on handfuls of vitamin-enriched fish in the hopes that after fledging and spending their first 2 or 3 years at sea, they would return to what they perceived as their natal colony. Between 1973 and 1988, 954 young Puffins were transplanted, of which 914 fledged successfully. By June 1977, transplanted Puffins started to return to Egg Rock; four pairs nested

there in 1981, 37 in 2001, and 104 by 2012, with more nesting on other islands in the region as a result of similar restoration efforts.

Peter G.H. Evans

MACDONALD, H. **H is for Hawk**. 300 pages. London: Jonathan Cape, 2014. Hardback, £14.99, ISBN 978-0-224-09700-0. Website: <http://www.vintage-books.co.uk>.

Interviewed for *The Guardian*, Helen Macdonald herself calls *H is for Hawk* a memoir, and, in this searing personal account of training a young Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, she has crafted a remarkable work, both tense and tender, that weaves some incandescent writing on nature with biography and autobiography. Stricken by the sudden death of her photographer father, Alisdair, Macdonald takes refuge in her lifelong knowledge of falconry, taking possession of the hawk – named Mabel (from *amabilis*, or loveable) – which emerges from a cardboard box on a Scottish quay, like, ‘a conjuring trick. A reptile. A fallen angel. A griffon from the pages of an illuminated bestiary’.

Macdonald has a constant poet’s eye and ear for phrases, coaxing descriptions of wonder at what her astringer’s struggle reveals about herself, about the loss of her father, and about her long-term relationship with the author T.H. White. Revealed in all his complexity, White stalks the book, a foil for Macdonald’s battles with both the rampant misery her father’s death implodes, and the training of her new hawk.

Indeed, the book often feels triptych-like, with photographs of White, Macdonald and her father framed separately, but hinged together. All through, Goshawks haunt this trio. Sometimes fierce, rebellious outsiders, bringing a thrilling wildness into the lives of the actors with, as Macdonald describes, all the mayhem of a ‘snow leopard tipped into a living room and found eating the cat’, but more often the tyro hawk, Mabel, provides a vehicle for the author’s forensic looking, listening, and sensing of nature.

From early childhood, we learn that Macdonald has always been a close observer, and certainly her background as a historian of science includes analysis of the birdwatcher as ornithologist and observer (*Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 33 (2002): 53–77). Her earlier work includes a monograph on falcons and falconry in the Reaktion Books Animal Series (2006), and a book of poems, *Shaler’s Fish* (Etruscan Books, 2001), all writing that leads into *H is for Hawk*, reassembling the historian, falconer, and prose poet, as one.

In *The Peregrine* (1967), J.A. Baker argued that: ‘The hardest thing of all to see is what is really there’, and this tension informs all 30 chapters, with some of her most intense writing surrounding her falconer’s close

contact with Mabel – the hawk’s scented breath ‘pepper and musk and burned stone’, or the ‘click, click, click’ of a nictitating membrane. As she carries her hawk at a Cambridge College summer party, the ‘chirrup of house martins drift down from above like distant fingertips on glass’, while, on a winter walk: ‘Clouds of linnets bounce, half-midges, half musical notation ...’. It is always vivid writing, and mixes the ancient language of hawking, such as rouse (the wonderful shuffling tail-wagging contented resettling of feathers), with the modern domestic space, so the anxious hawk draws-in ‘shrink-wrapped’.

It is not a term Edmund Bert, author of the 1619 *An Approved Treatise on Hawkes and Hawking*, would have known. At one point, Macdonald ponders whether Cambridge University’s copy of his rare and ‘bloody marvellous’ book was the same one T.H. White had read, finding another way of linking together his and her journeys. It is a mosaic that threads the book, a narrative that also proposes real healing in nature, in encounters with raptors and their prey that, albeit far bloodier, recall Richard Mabey’s *Nature Cure* (Chatto & Windus, 2005), his account of recovering from depression. The role nature plays in ‘well-being’ is a growing part of the contemporary debate on conservation (e.g. Sandifer *et al.* (2015) *Ecosyst. Serv.* 12: 1–15).

Macdonald’s watching, her time in the wild, of course, lies at the core of the fieldwork that yields much of the data that fuel papers published in this journal once a quarter. *H is for Hawk* is a deeply personal book, so it will only appeal to a subset of *Ibis* subscribers, but I suspect Helen Macdonald’s ability to lasso genres, to mix them up, and create something new – so varied in its pace and scale – offers a great deal to fellow watchers, whatever their avian subject.

It is no surprise that the author won both the Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-Fiction, and the biography and overall Costa Book Prize in 2014. She richly deserved them.

John Fanshawe

McCONNELL, S. **Witmer Stone. The Fascination of Nature**. xii + 411 pages, black-and-white photographs. Published by the author (witmer.stone@gmail.com), 2014. Paperback, US\$ 25.00, ISBN 978-0-692-22938-5. Website: <http://www.witmerstone.com>.

Only a small fraction of the many thousands of visitors to Cape May (New Jersey) will be familiar with the name of Witmer Stone (1866–1939) – or have read his *Bird Studies at Old Cape May* (1937; reprinted 1965, 2000). This thoroughly researched lucid biography, presented in themed chapters, brings to life one of North America’s foremost naturalists and will make his achievements more widely known. He comes across as a

kind, amiable and popular hard-working gentleman, on friendly terms with many of the other leading ornithologists of the day, especially William Brewster, Frank Chapman, Joseph Grinnell, Charles Richmond and Alexander Wetmore.

Stone's interest in wildlife began when he was a small child in Philadelphia. In his twenties he became a founding member of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club and in 1901 began a 10-year stint as editor of its journal, *Cassinia*. He had joined the American Ornithologists' Union in 1885 and later served on its committees on bird protection, on relations with the millinery trade, and on nomenclature and classification. In 1912, he began his 25-year editorship of *The Auk*, a far more onerous task than any journal editor would tolerate today: he edited and shortened contributions, reviewed countless items of current literature, announced conservation news, supplied obituaries, contributed his own papers, and carried out tedious financial and administrative duties. He took a leading role in producing the fourth AOU *Check-list of North American Birds* (1931), a monumental task in the days when taxonomy and nomenclature were generally more contentious and geographical ranges were less clear. Stone's botanical investigation of the Pine Barrens was expanded into his *Plants of Southern New Jersey* (1911), a companion volume to his *Mammals of New Jersey* (1908) and *Birds of New Jersey* (1909). Remarkably, all these activities were carried out in his spare time, away from his commitments at the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences where he served in various curatorial roles (and as Director 1925–28) over a 51-year period that saw the bird collection increase from 26 000 to 143 000 specimens.

He made his first visit to Cape May in 1890 but did not become an annual visitor until 1916. At that time the shooting of migrating raptors was a popular pastime there and McConnell, though full of admiration for his subject, is not afraid to point out the times when Stone missed or apparently avoided opportunities to reduce the depredations. Coverage of the struggle to protect the Cape's birds would have benefited from a couple of maps for those readers unfamiliar with the street names, vantage points and wider geography that make the area a world-renowned migration hot spot. Many of Stone's publications are mentioned in the Notes but a chronological bibliography of Stone's more significant publications would also have been a useful addition (a full bibliography would not have been practical because of the sheer volume of his output).

Stone's first task on arrival at the Philadelphia Academy had been to rescue its bird collection following 20 years of neglect since the death of John Cassin. Through the influence of his father, who had been Head Librarian at the Historical Society of Philadelphia, and through handling early specimens acquired by J.J. Audubon, William Gambel, Adolphus Heermann, Titian Peale,

John Kirk Townsend, Alexander Wilson and others, Stone developed a curiosity for the past that turned him into one of the earliest ornithological historians. He believed that it was the duty 'of present-day ornithologists to save from oblivion as many of the facts as possible concerning the lives of those who long ago laid the foundations of our science'. While editor of *Cassinia* he introduced the practice of starting each issue with a biographical sketch of a Philadelphia ornithologist, and elsewhere published many items of a historical nature, in time producing tributes to his deceased friends and contemporaries. Stone deserves an excellent biography of his own – and this is it.

Richard Mearns

McGRAIN, T. **The Lost Bird Project**. 85 pages, numerous colour illustrations. Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2014. Hardback, US\$24.95, ISBN 978-1-61168-566-4. Website: <http://www.upne.com>.

Inspired by Christopher Cokinos's book, *Hope Is the Thing with Feathers*, sculptor Todd McGrain embarked on a 10-year project to create public memorials to five North American birds driven to extinction in modern times: the Great Auk *Pinguinus impennis*, the Labrador Duck *Camptorhynchus labradorius*, the Passenger Pigeon *Ectopistes migratorius*, the Carolina Parakeet *Conuropsis carolinensis* and the Heath Hen *Tympanuchus cupido cupido*, a subspecies of the Greater Prairie Chicken. In *The Lost Bird Project* the artist shares his personal perspective on this monumental undertaking.

McGrain's bronze birds are muscular and magnificent, at once imposing and impotent – perfect for sculptures intended to communicate simultaneously both the absence and presence of the lost species. The lack of biological detail memorializes the birds as three-dimensional silhouettes that beg to be touched, thereby creating a physical connection between the present and the past that serves to militate against what McGrain terms the 'callousness of forgetting'. The image of children's hands reaching up to embrace the head of the Heath Hen memorial at the opening celebration is an uplifting indication that the artist's hopes for the function of his art might be fulfilled.

As the text makes clear, the project was as much about the careful placement of the sculptures at sites linked to their extinction, and their ownership by local communities, as it was about their creation. McGrain's accounts of how he and his colleague, Andrew Stern, settled on the locations for each of the five permanent memorials are all absorbing, but those relating to the Labrador Duck and the Passenger Pigeon are somewhat lighter on detail. Similarly, although the chapters on the Great Auk and the Heath Hen tell of the enthusiastic

engagement of local communities with their lost bird sculptures, there is little evidence that the Labrador Duck, Passenger Pigeon and Carolina Parakeet memorials enjoyed such a reception in their respective contexts. This might simply be due to space constraints, or perhaps it serves to illustrate the ongoing nature of the project as people continue to have the opportunity to encounter and respond to the lost birds now installed in the landscape.

The artist acknowledges that his sculptures 'offer little information beyond the language of surface and form', and only time will tell if he is not expecting too much of viewers in terms of serious reflection on what they represent and why they are where they are. It would be fascinating if in due course McGrain could produce a companion volume that collects evidence of the impact of the lost birds on the collective memories of their host communities, and the benefits for grassroots conservation.

A DVD documentary about the project is available from the website (www.lostbirdfilm.org); this is highly recommended viewing and serves to enhance the enjoyment of this exquisite book that documents a truly remarkable endeavour. If you ever get the chance to encounter the beguiling lost bird memorials 'in the wild', you should seize the opportunity. In the meantime, buy this book and the DVD, and while you're at it, the project T-shirt as well!

Nigel Hopper

MÖLLER, R. **Zur Geschichte der Vogelschutzwarte Seebach bei Mühlhausen (Thüringen)**. 192 pages, 7 colour photographs, 37 black-and-white illustrations, *Anzeiger des Vereins Thüringer Ornithologen Vol. 8, Special Issue 1, 2013*. Paperback, € 20.00, ISSN 0940-4708. Website: <http://www.vto-ev.de>.

This *History of the Seebach bird conservation station* is a publication for specialists in the history of bird protection; its 192 pages contain 1110 footnotes and an index, all in German though with a lengthy English abstract. It deals with the history of the moated castle of Seebach in Thüringen (eastern Germany), the home of this branch of the von Berlepsch family from 1501 until 1945. Its history is divided into two distinct parts, a typically German division: from 1908 to 1933 it was the home and workplace of an aristocratic enthusiast, from 1933 to 1989 a politically dominated institute run by two different totalitarian systems.

Hans Freiherr von Berlepsch, a cousin of the more famous ornithologist Hans Graf von Berlepsch, decided in 1908 to convert his entire estate into a bird reserve, though one that was to be a showcase for his own rather eccentric notions of how to protect birds, partly for their own sake but also as a form of natural pest control in his forestry and agricultural enterprises. Not an observatory

in the normal sense, as well as a home it was a teaching institution and a place to carry out experiments in new conservation techniques. Berlepsch insisted on three techniques that he claimed would keep all insect pest species in check: creation of nest-sites for both open- and cavity-nesters, winter feeding, and protection of birds from their enemies. He pioneered a variety of nestbox designs and feeding tables. A very important aspect of the station's work was lectures on bird protection for foresters, agriculturalists, officials, etc., though Berlepsch dogmatically insisted that only two books were to be used – his own (*Bird protection: its origin and practice on a scientific basis*, which went through 12 editions) and another by M. Hiesemann entitled (not surprisingly) *The Solution to the Question of Bird Protection according to Freiherr von Berlepsch*. This sort of thing, combined with the collapse of the old order and hyperinflation after the First World War and the lack of interest by his sons in anything ornithological, forced Berlepsch to consider moving to distant Westphalia to continue his life's work, but he died before his plans could be realized. However, he did live long enough to see the NSDAP come to power, which he thought could only help his conservation projects. That well-known nature lover A. Hitler was very excited by his bird table model 'Coburg'.

The second half of the story is less colourful. Under the very competent and clearly adaptable new director Karl Mansfeld, the experts at Seebach moved away from Berlepsch's simplistic notions in pest control and were often consulted about how Nazi Germany could increase its self-sufficiency through crop protection. Mansfeld had already begun his studies on the feeding ecology of some bird species using precise research methods, and he managed to steer Seebach through the Second World War as a charitable trust, and at the end of the conflict, Thüringen found itself in the Soviet occupied zone.

As an aristocratic estate, Seebach was confiscated by the government of the communist GDR in the course of its land reform policy, the station being subsumed into the German Academy of Agricultural Sciences. Mansfeld became a central figure in bird conservation in the GDR, helping to organize and launch some of that country's very impressive amateur research groups. His successor's intention to make the ornithological station the centre of applied ornithology in Thüringen was not realized, and instead it became the 'Ornithological Research Department of the Institute for Crop Protection Research of the Agricultural Sciences Academy of the GDR', until 1989 being dedicated to investigating the toxic side-effects of agricultural pesticides on birds.

Today, Seebach is a respected bird study and ringing centre, with the advantage of being in a recently restored romantic castle set in beautiful grounds. This journal issue might be very different from the histories that have been written about such institutions in the

British Isles, but it is a very important local exercise for a country like Germany, this year celebrating 25 years of peaceful reunification at the end of a century of political nightmares.

Brian Hillcoat

TAYLOR, M. & TIPLING, D. **RSPB Seabirds**. 240 pages, numerous colour photographs. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014. Hardback, £25.00, ISBN 978-1-4729-0901-5

The RSPB has indeed been busy publishing on seabirds! This large format book by Marianne Taylor, a freelance writer, is a species by species review of Britain's seabirds, also including divers (Gaviidae), grebes (Podicipedidae), seaducks, and phalaropes *Phalaropus* spp. This is another Bloomsbury publication with some of its proceeds going to the RSPB. The illustrations are excellent, the majority taken by wildlife photographer, David Tipling, but many also from the author herself. However, I was pleased to see the publishers directing attention to the aptness of the pictures in their selections and thus being prepared to include quality images from several other photographers. Although the author concentrates on the regular breeding species of seabirds, winter visitors and vagrants are included at the end of each family account. Thus we see pictures in this book of Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris*, White-faced Storm-petrel *Pelagodroma marina*, Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*, Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*, Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*, and Tufted Puffin *Fratercula cirrhata* – no mention of Fair Isle's Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Hydrobates monorhis*, though.

The species accounts draw their information largely from the *Seabird Populations of Britain and Ireland* book (Dunn *et al.*, 2004) and a number of other publications listed in the Bibliography. There are separate chapters for the different families and for each of the main species there are sections introducing that species, and summaries of its distribution, population size and habitat preferences, behaviour and diet, breeding, movements and migration, and conservation issues.

An enjoyable book to dip into – the text is well written and the design pleasing to the eye. I recommend this as an informative and up-to-date general review of the bird species inhabiting the waters around the British Isles.

Peter G.H. Evans

Also received

LEWIS, C. **An Illustrated Coastal Year: the Seashore Uncovered Season by Season**. 192 pages, colour illustrations. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.

Hardback, £20.00, ISBN 978-1-4729-1170-4. Website: <http://www.bloomsbury.com>.

Attractive watercolour paintings and brief but informative text are here combined to present typical British coastal fauna and flora over the four seasons. Among birds portrayed and described are ducks (Anatidae), divers (Gaviidae), Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*, Gannet *Morus bassanus*, Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* and Shag *P. aristotelis*, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, many waders, skuas (Stercorariidae), gulls and terns (Laridae), auks (Alcidae) and pipits (Motacillidae). The Greater Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* is incorrectly shown as having yellow legs and the Sanderling *Calidris alba* bears closer resemblance to a Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*.

There are also sections on many fish species, crustaceans, molluscs, starfish, jellyfish, sea urchins, moths and butterflies and other insects, and marine mammals. And there is much more for the reader to learn: making things from shells, polished sea glass and driftwood; tides and the moon; many recipes; sea areas and shipping forecasts; the Beaufort Scale and cloud formations.

M.G.W.

ODDIE, B. **Bill Oddie Unplucked: Columns, Blogs and Musings**. 224 pages, many drawings. London: Bloomsbury Natural History, 2015. Hardback, £14.99, ISBN 978-1-4729-1531-3. Website: <http://www.bloomsbury.com>.

This volume collects together almost 50 pieces of Bill Oddie's nature writing published since his departure from the BBC in 2008/2009 and his subsequent diagnosis with, and treatment for, bipolar disorder; a subject about which he is disarmingly candid in the Foreword.

Unplucked is a pleasingly eclectic mix of anecdote, opinion, observation and insight, all written in Oddie's no-nonsense, down-to-earth style. Topics range from disagreements with non-nature-loving neighbours to defending the use of anthropomorphism in natural history broadcasting; from pondering what is lost to technological gains in birding to promoting passion and power as an essential combination for effective conservation action; from sympathy for farmers to scathing critique of Government policy. Along the way there are some intriguing glimpses behind the scenes of various projects Oddie has worked on during his broadcasting career. As you'd expect, humour permeates much of the writing, one notable highlight being his account of his first-ever sighting of a Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus* (in Sweden).

Given the context-specific nature of some of the pieces it would have been helpful if the original publication dates for each had been included. Although this

collection might not be essential reading, it is nevertheless both informative and enjoyable. Oddie comes across as experienced and knowledgeable, yet humble and self-effacing; vulnerable, even (see his account of the realization that he is now deaf to the call of the Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*, for example). It is clear that he genuinely misses being on television; this, you sense, has little to do with his ego and a lot to do with his obvious passion for nature conservation, and his understanding of what a powerful medium the small screen is for communicating that passion and inspiring it in others. Indeed, you can't help but wonder if the content of *Unplucked* would be all the more compelling if it were delivered by the author onscreen.

Nigel Hopper

TAYLOR, M. **Robins. (RSPB Spotlight.)** 128 pages, numerous colour photographs and other illustrations. London: Bloomsbury Natural History, 2015. Paperback, £9.99, ISBN 978-1-4729-1211-4. Website: <http://www.bloomsbury.com>.

Marianne Taylor's impressive monograph of Britain's national bird, the Robin *Erithacus rubecula*, ends with 'Robins in Culture' (in poetry, at Christmas, etc.), whereas 'Science and Nature' emphasizes the amount of scientific work done on the species, not least the pioneering studies of David Lack and his *The Life of the Robin* (1943).

Earlier chapters, with detailed text and an abundance of fine photographs, begin with a general introduction to the species. In 'Relatives and Namesakes', mention is made, as expected, of the American Robin *Turdus migratorius*; two robins from Japan, formerly placed in *Erithacus*, are now regarded as belonging to a different genus: *Larvivora akahige* and *Larvivora komadori*. The Robin thus remains the sole representative of the genus *Erithacus*. Further topics discussed include territoriality and song, diet and feeding behaviour (in and away from gardens), the breeding cycle from courtship and pair-formation to fledging, migration of some British Robins (predominantly females) to southern Iberia and continental European birds to Britain. Threats to Robins include predation, hunger and cold, contagious diseases through contact with other birds at garden feeding stations, and bird trappers around the Mediterranean. As for the future, it seems that most Robin populations are stable or increasing.

M.G.W.

Sound recordings

BERGMANN, H.-H., CHAPPUIS, C. & DINGLER, K.-H. **Vogelstimmen im Flug – Bird Sounds in Flight – Voix**

des Oiseaux en Vol. 1 MP3 CD-ROM (playing time 5 h 48 min) with accompanying booklet (in German, English and French). 124 pages, 6 black-and-white photographs, colour photographs on front and back. Germering, Germany: Musikverlag Edition AMPLE, 2014. €39.95 (downloadable version €34.95), ISBN 978-3-938147-50-4. Website: <http://www.tierstimmen.de>.

This significant audio publication presents 850 sound recordings of 350 European bird species. Flight-calls, flight-songs and instrumental sounds (usually of wings) are all included. Some are typical flight-sounds, others are vocalizations that are sometimes given in flight but sometimes not. Many are unusual, or rarely heard, such as the gentle wingbeats of a Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiaticus*. There is a mix of mono and stereo recordings. Some of the latter are particularly evocative, imparting an additional sense of depth and movement as the subjects rush by; one of the Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* recordings is a lovely example.

Recordings are unannounced, the accompanying trilingual booklet providing vernacular and scientific names, and brief comments on each sound (some details also appear onscreen during playback, though the automatic cycling, every few seconds, between four lines of text per recording, becomes rather indigestible). Obvious background species are also noted. The booklet's English and French sections do not give details of recording date, location or sound-recordist, though these can be hunted down in the more complete German part. The index lists the track number for each species, though not the page number where that recording is described.

There is a different emphasis on species from usual. The Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, for example, is represented by a single, 25-s, recording of adult wing-sounds adjacent to the nest (with food-begging nestlings), which contrasts with the 'Sentinel-of-the-marshes', the Redshank *Tringa totanus*, which has eight recordings, of a variety of alarm- and display-calls, lasting over two min. A scattering of common species, including Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* and Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* are absent, though this shouldn't be taken to imply that they never vocalize during flight, rather that appropriate recordings weren't sourced.

Although MP3 compression is not beloved by audiophiles, few listeners should, in practice, be aware of any signal degradation (other factors often being more important), and this approach has the advantage of enabling almost 6 h of recordings to be squeezed onto a single disc. Discs, however, are not the ideal medium for use in the field; the alternative option of purchasing the recordings as a download addresses this, enabling users to play them on equipment better suited for outdoor use.

Many flight-sounds pose a significant challenge to record well, as they are often rapidly moving and

distant, but the recordists here have had considerable success. This is a fine, and extensive, collection of sound-recordings which will have taken substantial time, effort and skill, in the field, to gather.

Bird Sounds in Flight is a valuable resource for anyone wishing to extend their knowledge of acoustic species-recognition beyond the typical audio field-guide.

William T.C. Seale